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AUTHOR Wedemeyer, Charles A.
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ABSTRACT

All "open" schools have one principle in common; they represent efforts to expand the freedoms of learners. Some features characteristic of open education are the involvement of more people, more part-time learners, a curriculum relevant to life, and a broadening of the learning environment. Emphasis is on the learner with a diminishing of learner dependency on teachers and schools. The ideal concept would take the form of education permanente. Some signs that the open school may be significant for our times are: the impact of population and knowledge explosions, increased need for retraining/re-education, special needs of minority groups, competency recognition, and the dissaffection of learners with conventional schooling. A comprehensive open school model is the proposed Wisconsin Open School, which will create a corollary system of education for all the people of the State, cradle-to-grave, and will be meshed with existing State educational systems. It will involve: a system of uniform transferability of credit; learning resources and communications resource centers; a laboratory approach; a lifelong curriculum; program teams, delivery systems, access systems, local advisors, counselors, and community volunteers. A "once and future" school, the Wisconsin Open School is designed to be self-renewing, generating new models and fresh applications. (EA)

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The Once and Future School

(for Educational Media Council Seminar on Open Learning,
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by

Charles A. Wedemeyer
The William H. Lighty Professor of Education
The University of Wisconsin Extension

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THE CONCEPT OF OPEN EDUCATION

The term "open" has been given to so many experimental educational programs, at so many levels, that it is difficult to find a common definition that will describe -- or be acceptable to -- all the different enterprises that use the term. There are "open" schools at the pre-school level, the primary-elementary and secondary level, and in higher and continuing education. However, all the open schools have one principle in common: they are to a greater or lesser extent efforts to expand the freedoms of learners. Some of the open schools are open only in a spatial sense, with learners in school freer to move about in more individualized work patterns; others provide freedoms in more significant dimensions -- in admissions, in selection of courses, in adaptation of the curriculum to the individual, and freedoms in time as well as spatial aspects (i.e., learners permitted to start, stop, and proceed at their own pace and convenience). Still others approach the ultimate freedoms -- learner goal selection, reaching the learner where he is, in his own environment and situation, on his own terms.

"Open Education" is therefore characterized by a number of features, not all of which are present in each example, nor each of which is exclusive to open education. These features include:

-Opening education to more people -- of all ages -- to enroll in formal and informal programs regardless of where they live, their age, previous experience, schooling, or socio-economic condition; a broadening and spreading of educational opportunity.

-Employing some approach to open admissions (no restricted "places"; credit for previous learning; credit by exam; recognition of life and work experience and independently acquired learning.)

-Employing multiple open channels for communications (a school without walls) via radio, TV, mail and other media in independent study approaches, as well as class and group experiences.

-Making available an open curriculum relevant to the life and learning styles of different people, all of whom carry some degree of responsibility for selecting their own goals, helping in curriculum development, and participating in decision-making regarding their own learning.

-Facilitating open access to learning in homes, libraries, on jobs, in communities as well as in schools; in other words the broadening or opening of the learning environment.

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-Encouraging the open participation of part-time learners who combine working with learning.

-Seeking open accreditation between the regular and open schools.

-Arranging open cooperation, resource and staff sharing between the regular and open schools, libraries, public and private schools, business, industry and community resources -- in

program policy
program development
program delivery
program access
and program evaluation

-Regarding as highly relevant the needs, convenience and individually oriented life situations of the learners; programs that are learner oriented.

-Recognizing that life-long learning is an imperative, and seeking to diminish the dependency of learners on teachers and schools, by teaching learners to be to a larger extent responsible for their own learning, and to have confidence in proceeding without the dependency relation that is fostered in conventional schools.

-Regarding as irrelevant the question of whether teachers and learners are always present at the same time and in the same place, because the ultimate learning "environment" is the learner himself, wherever he is, with the open school communicating, supporting, encouraging, serving and guiding.

-Creating new roles for teachers, roles that are closer to the classical Platonic model, with teachers as critic, guide, adviser, mentor, and problem-solver.

-Accepting the learner as a full partner in the processes that link teaching and learning towards mutually selected and accepted goals; the individualization of teaching based on the recognition of the individuality of learning.

The ideal concept of open education would take the form of education permanente, open to people at all levels, cradle-to-grave. No open education program now in existence goes this far.

WHY IS OPEN EDUCATION NEEDED?

Our present educational institutions were originally created to serve the social, economic, technological and cultural needs of other times; furthermore, the models upon which present institutions were based were drawn from even earlier periods.

Social institutions are created to operate within contexts which give them viability and relevance. When contexts change, as they now have, institutions lose viability and relevance for some portion of the society they are intended to

serve. It is then necessary to adapt or modify institutions according to the new contexts, or, if that doesn't succeed, to create new institutions.

Since World War II we in education have been busy adapting and modifying (Jack Arbolino has called it "diddling") our institutions to fit the post World War II contexts. Yet a substantial part of our population (as shown by surveys, and indicated by the social and cultural disarray of the past 10-15 years) is not being well served by our institutions, and there is need for a new educational institution. That new institution (using the term very broadly) may be the open school, which seems to fit, in an ideological sense, the new contexts of our society.

Any educational enterprise (new or adapted from existing institutions) which proposes to meet the contexts of our times, will, it seems to me, have to satisfy ten new requirements which are derived from the changed contexts that characterize society today.

1. The system should be capable of operation any place where there are students--or even only one student--whether or not there are teachers at the same place at the same time.
2. The system should place greater responsibility for learning on the student.
3. The system should free faculty members from custodial type duties so that more time can be given to truly educational tasks.
4. The system should offer learners wider choices (more opportunities) in curricula, courses, formats, methodologies.
5. The system should use, as appropriate, all the teaching media and methods that have been proved effective.
6. The system should mix and combine media and methods so that each subject or unit within a subject is taught in the best way known.
7. The system should cause the redesign and development of courses to fit into an "articulated media program."
8. The system should preserve and enhance opportunities for adaptation to individual differences.
9. The system should evaluate student achievement directly, not by raising barriers concerned with the place the student studies, the rate at which he studies, the method by which he studies, or the sequence within which he studies.
10. The system should permit students to start, stop, and learn at their own paces.

If schools can meet these requirements, there is a reasonable hope that they will fit the new contexts of our society resulting from radical changes related to

(a) The population explosion.
(b) The knowledge explosion.
(c) The increase in complexity of all aspects of living.
(d) The increase in educational requirements for almost all jobs.
(e) The acceleration of rate-of-change in nearly all occupations, particularly as related to job-knowledge technology.
(f) The increase in probability that substantial numbers of workers of nearly all classes must face periods of personal obsolescence during their life-times--obsolescence which will not be removed without personal retraining or re-education.
(g) The increased mobility of almost all citizens.
(h) The increase in the number of client groups that must be served by

education. Social, economic, and technologic changes have in recent years brought to women greater freedom from home and family duties than ever before, and to some men, periods free from the necessity of gainful employment. The new consumers of education must vie with increased numbers of youths for opportunities and facilities already qualitatively inadequate.

(i) The special learning needs of minority groups, members of sub-cultures within our society, who do not always respond to conventional instruction, but who cannot become useful members of society without adequate education.

(j) Technological advances in communications--the ending of space/time limitations on schooling.

(k) New concepts of teaching/learning as separate activities.

(l) New perceptions of the learning environment--where the learner is.

(m) The disaffection of learners with conventional schooling; half of our youth are disenchanted with that part of organized society they know best--the schools.

(n) Granting recognition of competence as the basis for accreditation/certification.

Any new or modified education system must meet the expectations and aspirations of its patrons or clients if we are to move towards a "learning society," where learning begins to assume a societal role somewhat similar to what William James (in the early 20th Century) was seeking, and what Vannevar Bush (in the post World War II period) regarded as an imperative for the survival of society: learning as a possible "moral equivalent to war"; or aggression; or even to "work," as Robert Theobald has suggested.

Studies of the attitudes of youth in the 60's and 70's (e.g.: The Rockefeller Report of '71, by David Yankelowich, Inc., and Ginott, "Between Parent and Teenager," Forture; '69; and in Sweden the SIFO Surveys of '69-'70-'71-'72, and the studies by Clas Westrill) give important leads in designing learning programs.

For example, youth are saying:

"Do not study to reach a position; study what is worthwhile and self-developing."

"Say goodbye to marks and merits. Make yourself a worthy person."

Note that over 50% of U.S. youth want a change in the education system--especially in the universities. They attack the rigidity of the school system; they want it to adapt better to present-day society. They also want more democracy in the schools. They want a decentralization of education.

Youth realize and accept they may have more than one profession or occupation in their lives. They see life as a series of short pulls: the new ars vivendi (art of living) is to create a tolerable life pattern out of unsequential, scattered contributions, experiences, learnings.

Just under 50% of youth have positive attitudes towards the Establishment. However, they prefer to cooperate with community leaders rather than with leaders of industry, Congress or government. They distrust Establishment motives; they fear the concealment of problems; they want action and results, not a "put off."

Surveys of older citizens show somewhat different attitudes, but a surprising

agreement respecting attitudes towards the changes needed in schools, and strong desires for a more open and democratic learning system, acceptance of technology in learning, and perceptions of learning needs (retraining/new career lines/coping/fulfillment) that is way ahead of present programming in post secondary and continuing education. We sense a strong desire--almost a demand--from youth and adult surveys--to create the "moral" school--one that diligently serves learners more than it serves itself.

The plight of the "father-mother" generation calls for a new concept of life-long learning to fit the needs of this generation: The extended institutionalized programs of conventional schools (requiring 20-30 years of full time schooling, never terminal) adds heavy burdens to that generation to sustain the young for this long period. At the other extreme, the "grandfather-grandmother" generation is living 10 years longer, adding further burdens in taxes as well as personal cost and care to provide for the dependencies of the older generation. There is growing evidence that the father-mother generation (called the "kin-keeping generation" by some) wants better ways to educate youth and adults that are less costly, fit better the present societal contexts, does not institutionalize youth and young adults so long, allows more learning on a part-time basis along with working, etc.

Technological development and the mass media have convinced millions of people they can learn as well from mediated instruction as in conventional classrooms. The consistent yield of "no significant difference" in comparative studies of instructional methods backs them up.

If we read all these signs correctly, the open school seems to have a practical as well as ideological significance for our times.

A COMPREHENSIVE OPEN SCHOOL MODEL

Among the models for open learning is the proposed Wisconsin Open School.

Nearly four years ago the then Governor of Wisconsin, Warren Knowles, appointed a special Commission on Education to come up with recommendations for statewide educational policy for the future; particularly to promote utilization of modern technology, improve educational results and increase efficiency. As the originator of AIM, (one of the first experimental programs into more open learning systems) and consultant in the development of the British Open University, I was lent by my University to head a special Task Force on Open Education for the Commission. Using a modified systems development approach, the Task Force produced a highly original and comprehensive report, along with a model, summarized in its report, The Open School (now unfortunately again out of print).

The Wisconsin Open School proposal would create a corollary system of education for all the people of the state, cradle-to-grave. It would be meshed with the program development of all existing educational systems in the state. It would be a program generating, delivery and access agency, drawing upon established public and private educational institutions, business, government, industry, and libraries for its major resources. Its framers took care not to create another bureaucracy, but instead invented an institutional entity that -- to survive -- would have to be continually self-renewing and accountable.

The proposed clientele of the Wisconsin Open School includes pre-school

children, remedial students, high school and college drop-outs, on-the-job and part-time learners, professionals, interns, housewives, persons confined to institutions, retired persons, and others who are either not adequately served or are overlooked by conventional institutions of education.

The Wisconsin proposal recommended:

1. The creation of an Open Education Board composed of members of the governing boards of each of the state's educational systems; members representing private education and libraries; members representing business and industry, commercial broadcasting, labor and students.

2. That State education authorities establish a system of uniform transferability of credit which will open new routes to degrees, diplomas, and certificates for students of the Open School programs, and establish competency-based performance acknowledgements for students of Open School programs whose needs cannot adequately be met by credit transfer; these acknowledgements to include degrees, diplomas, and certificates if necessary.

3. That the Open Education Board establish a system to identify, coordinate, and extend those state academic and communications resources whose mutual development will be of greatest educational and economic benefit to the state. The system recommended would consist of two Resource Centers; The Learning Resources Center, and the Communications Resources Center, with a program development and delivery unit called the Open School.

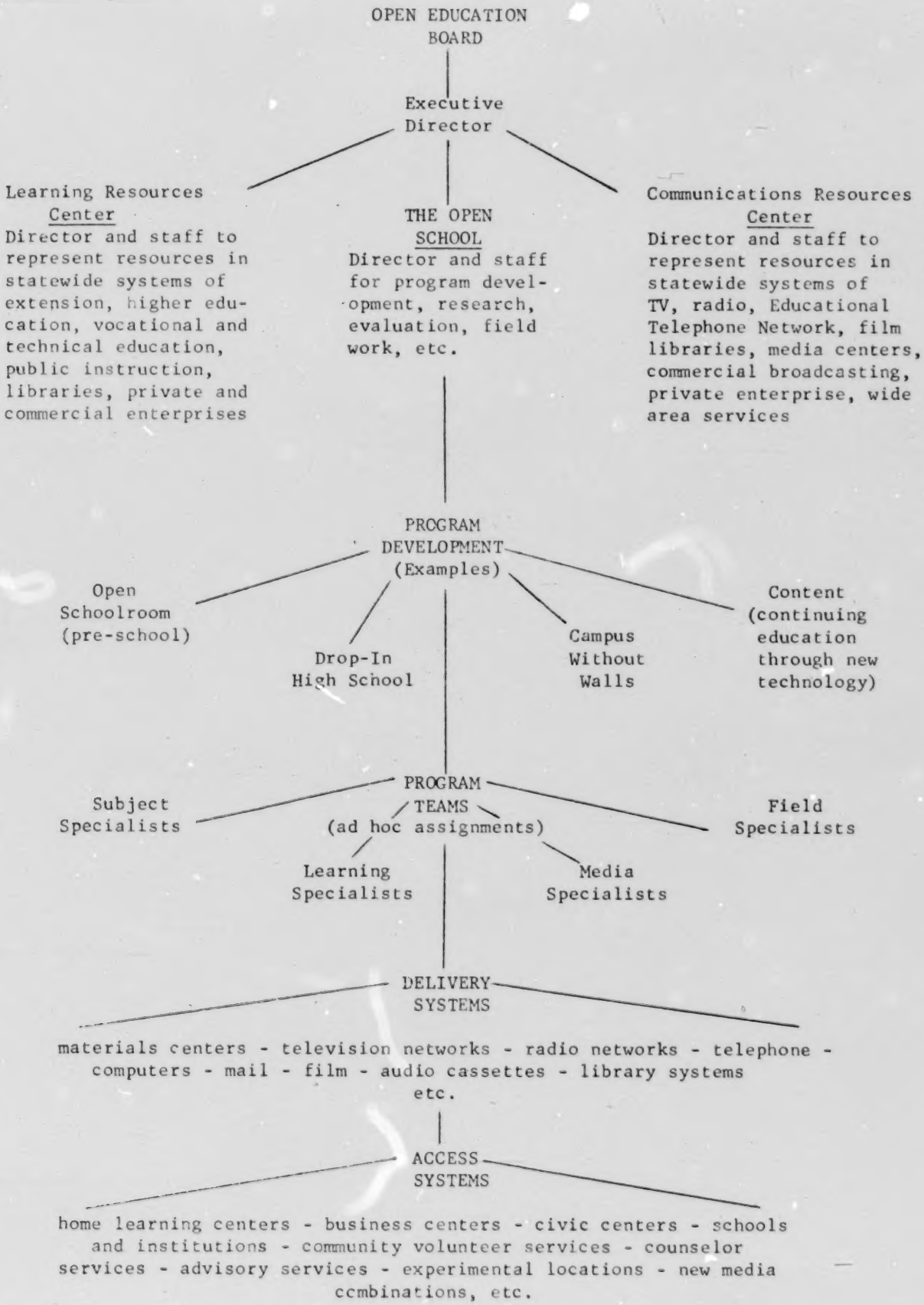
4. That the Open School unit of the system be designed to serve the unfilled educational needs of people throughout the state with programs developed in coordination with the Learning Resources and Communications Resources Centers; that the Open School thus serve as a laboratory for testing new educational technologies and approaches.

5. That the Open School design a balanced offering of credit and non-credit programs; that the programs develop a curriculum of learning as a lifelong experience; and that the programs be matched to people's needs and abilities, not solely to age or previous schooling.

6. That the Open School develop a structure of Program Teams, Delivery Systems, and Access Systems with the involvement of specialists in content development, learning theory, media and technology, and counseling, in order to design instruction adjusted to students' needs and situations throughout each project.

7. That the Open School implement a structure of local advisors, counselors, and community volunteers to aid in directing students into programs and to aid in assessing needs and employing resources at the local level.

The model proposed takes this shape:


OPEN EDUCATION BOARD
Executive Director
Learning Resources Center
Director and staff to represent resources in statewide systems of extension, higher education, vocational and technical education, public instruction, libraries, private and commercial enterprises
THE OPEN SCHOOL
Director and staff for program development, research, evaluation, field work, etc.
Communications Resources Center
Director and staff to represent resources in statewide systems of TV, radio, Educational Telephone Network, film libraries, media centers, commercial broadcasting, private enterprise, wide area services
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT (Examples)
Open Schoolroom (pre-school)
Drop-In High School
Campus Without Walls
Content (continuing education through new technology)
PROGRAM TEAMS (ad hoc assignments)
Subject Specialists
Learning Specialists
Media Specialists
Field Specialists
DELIVERY SYSTEMS
materials centers - television networks - radio networks - telephone - computers - mail - film - audio cassettes - library systems etc.
ACCESS SYSTEMS
home learning centers - business centers - civic centers - schools and institutions - community volunteer services - counselor services - advisory services - experimental locations - new media combinations, etc.

Some of the unique features of Wisconsin's Open School proposal (besides its comprehensive cradle-to-grave service to citizens) are its emphasis on cooperative programming; identification of new audiences who are not now being served by conventional forms of education; new mixes of professional and technical knowledge in developing programs; the use of existing community resources and facilities, faculties, and communications; and an emphasis on instructional activities of a multi-sensory nature. The Open School is designed to be self renewing; the nucleus of a future regional system; to include manpower development features; to employ performance/competency based types of learner assessment; to fit the contexts of our present society; to employ technology for the decentralization of learning and the diminishing of institutional dependencies--seeking for modern technology the same effect as that of the book on an earlier society; to be consonant with the aspirations and expectations of youth and adults regarding learning; to employ new theory regarding learning and teaching and environment; and to operate at a level of aggregation that will achieve a desirable cost/benefit ratio.

Although Wisconsin has not adopted the model proposed, a Statewide Regents Degree program has been approved. The presence of the model itself is a continuing spur to further development, and the impact of the report and model elsewhere is a continual reminder of unfinished business.

THE "ONCE AND FUTURE" SCHOOL

The "once and future" school for open learning will, perhaps, always be becoming. Perhaps that's an important part of its significance. The open school will continue to generate new models, and fresh applications. It will never be fixed and immutable; never, hopefully, the victim of institutional rigor mortis.

In 1958 Terrence Hanbury wrote a book about King Arthur and the Round Table, called "The Once and Future King." The "once and future" concept applies equally well to the Open School. Conceived out of old and new needs being met in continually changing contexts, the Open School is responsive to the aspirations of all learners, blending with other educational institutions. The future of the Open School is in the learners and teachers who seek for themselves and others those freedoms in learning that help each person to become what he can and will, without the barriers that characterized an older concept of learning and a narrower concept of man.

JJ:9/6/73